World Health Assembly agrees to launch process to develop historic global accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response

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1 December 2021 | News release | Geneva | Reading time: 2 min (456 words)

In a consensus decision aimed at protecting the world from future infectious diseases crises, the World Health Assembly today agreed to kickstart a global process to draft and negotiate a convention, agreement or other international instrument under the Constitution of the World Health Organization to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said the decision by the World Health Assembly was historic in nature, vital in its mission, and represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen the global health architecture to protect and promote the well-being of all people.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the many flaws in the global system to protect people from pandemics: the most vulnerable people going without vaccines; health workers without needed equipment to perform their life-saving work; and ‘me-first’ approaches that stymie the global solidarity needed to deal with a global threat,” Dr Tedros said.

“But at the same time, we have seen inspiring demonstrations of scientific and political collaboration, from the rapid development of vaccines, to today’s commitment by countries to negotiate a global accord that will help to keep future generations safer from the impacts of pandemics.”

The Health Assembly met in a Special Session, the second-ever since WHO’s founding in 1948, and adopted a sole decision titled: “The World Together.” The decision by the Assembly establishes an intergovernmental negotiating body (INB) to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement, or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, with a view to adoption under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution, or other provisions of the Constitution as may be deemed appropriate by the INB.

Article 19 of the WHO Constitution provides the World Health Assembly with the authority to adopt conventions or agreements on any matter within WHO’s competence. The sole instrument established under Article 19 to date is the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which has made a significant and rapid contribution to protecting people from tobacco since its entry into force in 2005.

Under the decision adopted today, the INB will hold its first meeting by 1 March 2022 (to agree on ways of working and timelines) and its second by 1 August 2022 (to discuss progress on a working draft). It will also hold public hearings to inform its deliberations; deliver a progress report to the 76th World Health Assembly in 2023; and submit its outcome for consideration by the 77th World Health Assembly in 2024.

Through the decision, the World Health Assembly also requested the WHO Director-General to convene the INB meetings and support its work, including by facilitating the participation of other United Nations system bodies, non-state actors, and other relevant stakeholders in the process to the extent decided by the INB.

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